

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) An axle housing assembly comprising:

a first housing portion including a first attachment interface and at least one first suspension flange having a first substantially flat engagement surface; and

a second housing portion including a second attachment interface and at least one second suspension flange having a second substantially flat engagement surface, said at least one second suspension flange being positioned in an overlapping relationship with said at least one first suspension flange such that said first and second substantially flat engagement surfaces are in direct abutting contact to define a suspension mount interface for supporting a suspension load wherein said first and second housing portions are permanently attached to each other along said first and second attachment interfaces.

2. (Original) The assembly of claim 1 including a seam weld extending along said first and second attachment interfaces.

3. (Currently Amended) The assembly of claim 2 wherein said first housing portion includes a first pair of vertical sides, an upper horizontal surface interconnecting said first pair of vertical sides, and a pair of lower weld surfaces formed on distal edges of said first pair of vertical sides with said first attachment interface being defined along said pair of lower weld surfaces, and wherein said second housing portion includes a second pair of vertical sides, a lower horizontal surface interconnecting said second pair of vertical sides, and a pair of upper weld surfaces formed on distal edges of said second pair of vertical sides with said second attachment interface being defined along said pair of upper weld surfaces.

4. (Currently Amended) The assembly of claim ~~2~~3 wherein said at least one first suspension flange extends outwardly from at least one vertical side of said first pair of vertical sides proximate said pair of lower weld surfaces ~~outwardly from a vertical side wall of said first housing portion,~~ and said at least one second suspension flange extends outwardly from at least one vertical side of said second pair of vertical sides proximate said pair of upper weld surfaces ~~outwardly from a vertical side wall of said second housing portion.~~

5. (Currently Amended) The assembly of claim 4 wherein said at least one first and second suspension flanges are perpendicular to said first and second pairs of vertical side walls, respectively.

6. (Currently Amended) The assembly of claim 4 wherein said at least one first and second suspension flanges include radiussed corners.

7. (Currently Amended) The assembly of claim 1 wherein said first and second housing portions each include a center section with a first leg portion extending outwardly from a first side of said center section and a second leg portion extending outwardly from a second side of said center section opposite from said first side, said first leg portion including said at least one first and second suspension flanges forming said suspension mount interface as a first suspension mount interface and wherein said second leg portion includes a third suspension flange formed on said first housing portion and a fourth suspension flange formed on said second housing portion and positioned in an overlapping relationship to said third suspension flange to define a second suspension mount interface.

8. (Currently Amended) The assembly of claim 1 including at least one aperture formed in each of said at least one first and second suspension flanges and at least one fastener installed within said at least one aperture to secure a suspension component to said first and second housing portions.

9. (Currently Amended) The assembly of claim 1 including a suspension weld interface defined by at least one of said first ~~or~~ and second suspension flanges wherein a suspension component is permanently attached to said first and second housing portions along said suspension weld interface.

10. (Currently Amended) ~~The assembly of claim 1~~ An axle housing assembly comprising:

a first housing portion including a first attachment interface and at least one first suspension flange; and

a second housing portion including a second attachment interface and at least one second suspension flange positioned in an overlapping relationship with said at least one first suspension flange to define a suspension mount interface for supporting a suspension load wherein said first and second housing portions are permanently attached to each other along said first and second attachment interfaces and wherein said suspension mount interface accommodates a plurality of different suspensions including at least a first suspension having a first spring center and a second suspension having a second spring center that is narrower than said first spring center.

11. (Currently Amended) ~~The assembly of claim 1~~ An axle housing assembly comprising:

a first housing portion including a first attachment interface and at least one first suspension flange; and

a second housing portion including a second attachment interface and at least one second suspension flange positioned in an overlapping relationship with said at least one first suspension flange to define a suspension mount interface for supporting a suspension load wherein said first and second housing portions are permanently attached to each other along said first and second attachment interfaces and wherein at least one of said first ~~or~~ and second housing portions includes at least one indentation extending inwardly toward an axle housing centerline, said indentation forming a pocket for a fastener.

12-14. (Cancelled)

15. (Currently Amended) A method for forming a suspension mount interface on an axle housing comprising the steps of:

(a) forming at least one first suspension flange on a first axle housing half, the at least one first suspension flange presenting a first substantially flat engagement surface;

(b) forming at least one second suspension flange on a second axle housing half, the at least one second suspension flange presenting a second substantially flat engagement surface;

(c) aligning the at least one first and second suspension flanges in an overlapping relationship such that the first and second substantially flat engagement surfaces are in direct abutting contact; and

(d) welding the first and second axle housing halves to each other along a weld interface to define a suspension mount interface with the at least one first and second suspension flanges.

16. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 15 further including the steps of integrally forming the at least one first suspension flange with the first axle housing half and integrally forming the at least one second suspension flange with the second axle housing half.

17. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 15 including the step of attaching a vehicle suspension component to the at least one first and second suspension flanges.

18. (Currently Amended) ~~The method of claim 15 including steps of~~ A method for forming a suspension mount interface on an axle housing comprising the steps of:

(a) forming at least one first suspension flange on a first axle housing half;

(b) forming at least one second suspension flange on a second axle housing half;

(c) forming at least one indentation in a vertical wall of at least one of the first or second axle housing halves;

(d) aligning the at least one first and second suspension flanges in an overlapping relationship;

(e) welding the first and second axle housing halves to each other along a weld interface to define a suspension mount interface with the at least one first and second suspension flanges; and

(f) positioning a fastener within the indentation, and fastening a suspension component to the at least one first and second suspension flanges with the fastener.

19. (Currently Amended) ~~The method of claim 15 including the steps of~~ A method for forming a suspension mount interface on an axle housing comprising the steps of:

- (a) forming at least one first suspension flange on a first axle housing half;
- (b) forming at least one second suspension flange on a second axle housing half;
- (c) aligning the first and second suspension flanges in an overlapping relationship;
- (d) welding the first and second axle housing halves to each other along a weld interface to define a suspension mount interface with the at least one first and second suspension flanges; and
- (e) defining a first suspension spring center relative to the suspension mount interface using the at least one first and second suspension flanges and defining a second suspension spring center relative to the suspension mount interface using the same first and second suspension flanges wherein the second suspension spring center is narrower than the first suspension spring center.

20. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 19 including the step of changing from the first suspension spring center to the second suspension spring center by moving a suspension attachment position laterally along the at least one first and second suspension flanges.